

City of Northampton, MA
Public Shade Tree Commission (PSTC)

April 3, 2019

Meeting Minutes

Submitted by: Beth Willard

Meeting Called to Order

Lilly Lombard, Chair called the meeting to order at 4:33 PM and announced the audio/visual recording of the meeting.

Members present and absent/introductions:

| Member | Present | Time if arriving late or leaving early |
|---------------------------------|----------------|---|
| Lilly Lombard, Chair | X | |
| Todd Ford, Vice Chair | X | |
| Molly Hale | X | |
| Jennifer Werner | X | |
| Marilyn Castriotta | X | |
| Rob Postel | Absent | |
| Susan Lofthouse | X | |
| Staff & Visitors | Present | Time if arriving late or leaving early |
| Richard Parasiliti, Tree Warden | X | |
| Beth Willard, DPW Clerk | X | |
| 2Degrees Neighborhood Group | X | 4:47 |

Public Comment

- No public comment

Approval of previous minutes

- Minutes were read by commission members.

| Motion | Motion By: | Seconded By: | Vote: |
|-----------------------------------|------------|---------------|------------------------|
| To approve March 20, 2019 minutes | Molly Hale | Sue Lofthouse | Yes 5, No 0, Abstain 1 |

Chair Report

- Lilly announced that Madeleine’s video had been awarded first prize.
 - Lilly forwarded it to DCR in the hopes that it will aid in the dissemination of the information.
- 3/28 Planning Board meeting re: solar array ordinance
 - Lilly attended the Planning Board meeting.
 - The draft of the ordinance looked different from what had been expected, so she asked if their vote could be delayed so the differences could be considered.
 - The Planning Board felt it was imperative to move forward on the ordinance, so the denied request was denied.
 - They felt other opportunities existed for public input on the issues.
 - This was not a unanimous decision by the Board.

- They also allowed Habitat to be waived of the requirement to replace trees that are removed for solar at their site on Glendale Rd.
- Lilly felt that there is a need to keep track of the trees removed in the city.
 - Carolyn Misch has a spreadsheet on this. Rich will contact her for it.

Tree Warden Report

- Rich reported that he held a Public Shade Tree Hearing on Park Hill Rd. at the site of a culvert replacement.
 - 5 Trees were identified as being necessary to remove for the project: 3 ½” & 4 ½” American Beeches, 5” & 7” Sugar Maples, and an 11” Scrub Elm.
 - There were no objections to the removals.
 - He plans to plant replacement trees in the Park Hill Rd. area.
- Rich is proofing the final draft of the trifold brochure.
- The Every Door Direct Mailer (EDDM) card is finished, but there was a glitch between the printer and the Post Office.
 - It is still on track and should be ready before Arbor Day.

| Motion | Motion By: | Seconded By: | Vote: |
|---|---------------|--------------|------------------------|
| To move Tree Northampton Update on the agenda to the position before Guest: 2Degrees neighborhood group | Sue Lofthouse | Molly Hale | Yes 6, No 0, Abstain 0 |

Tree Northampton update

- Sue got emails out this morning asking for volunteers for Arbor Day.
 - Councilor LaBarge would like to put this on SHARE.
- She spoke with Rob about the bare root trees for Arbor Day planting.
 - There are 56 bare root trees for Arbor Day.
 - They include 16 Elms and 15 Kentucky Coffee Trees.
 - They will need to be planted fast, requiring a lot of volunteers to accomplish this.
 - Rich noted that if the trees are delivered on Tuesday, they will start planting them Wednesday and Thursday, with the Arbor Day locations at the Cahill Apartments and the YMCA to be done maybe in one day.
 - The underwire stock won't be available on that day.
 - Sue will try to line up strong leaders and teams for the plantings on Wednesday through Saturday.
 - She will meet with Rob this weekend and reach out to specific leaders.
 - She will also contact the PSTC members who have volunteered with specific assignments.
 - Both Jenn and Marilyn offered vehicles to transport items on Arbor Day.
- Pruning ended about one week ago, and planting season has started.
- Alicia is working with Rich on the fliers
- Lilly mentioned that Madeleine would be joining the Sunday planting group.

Guest: 2Degrees neighborhood group

- Lilly noted the group was centered around the Massasoit St. neighborhood.

- Members attending tonight include:
 - Martha Nathan, 24 Massasoit St.
 - Nick Warren, 79 Olander Dr.
 - Kitsang Boos, 309 Elm St.
 - Renna Pye, 60 Crescent St.
- Martha Nathan stated that they supported the PSTC request for more time to study the solar array ordinance.
 - She found it to be very complex and requiring expert advice.
- Martha noted that 2Degrees is a Climate Change group, and talked about gas leaks.
 - They found on the HEETMA website that there was a gas leak at the location they were meeting.
 - They then began to push Columbia Gas to fix the leaks, even meeting with Steve Bryant, the CEO of Columbia Gas at the time.
 - About 2% of gas piped into Massachusetts is lost into the air.
 - There are three grades of gas leaks:
 - Grade 1 is a leak in an enclosed space that could blow up.
 - Grade 2 is a leak close to an enclosed space that could blow up.
 - Grade 3 is everything else.
 - There are tens of thousands of Grade 3 leaks in Massachusetts.
 - She discussed the method of identifying Grade 3 Large Volume Leaks (LVL).
 - They negotiated an agreement in January 2017 with Columbia Gas to fix all LVL's of greater than 10,000 sq. ft. within 1 year, and those greater than 2,000 sq. ft. within 2 years.
 - In October 2017, Eversource and National Grid also signed on to the agreement.
 - Martha did not know the number of LVL's in Northampton.
 - Lilly mentioned that even the smallest gas leaks near trees can kill them.
 - Martha noted that the smallest leak that Columbia Gas is required to repair is a 50' x 40' area, which precludes the tree belt.
 - She asked for some method of holding Columbia Gas responsible for fixing leaks that are affecting trees, as well as holding them liable for any trees killed.
 - Lilly noted that there already some laws in regard to trees which require the Gas Company to compensate for property loss/damage, and they have been upheld.
 - Todd also pointed out it is also covered by the Significant Tree Ordinance.
 - Todd felt this really was a case of negligence on the part of MA DPU.
 - He suggested pressuring the governor, who appoints the DPU members.
 - Nick Warren of 2Degrees asked about what resources the DPU had to supervise the Gas Utility.
 - Martha replied that the DPU only requires the reporting of leaks.
 - Rich mentioned that the City is buying a Bascomb meter (gas sniffer) at a cost of \$1,800.
 - The meter reads both O and CH .
 - Todd felt there should be a plan to deal with the data collected.
 - Rich said the first thing would be to call Columbia Gas about the leak.

- Martha noted that the data could be compiled on the leaks killing trees, and then could be used for an ordinance to hold the Gas Company accountable.
- He noted that gas leaks are not even on the radar for most arborists and landscapers.
 - A tree company will just remove a dead tree and it might be replaced by someone other than them, so a gas problem would probably not be detected.
 - Lilly thought it would be a good presentation for a Tree Warden’s meeting.
 - Rich said he would need to submit an outline ahead of time.

Draft Ordinance 18.231 discussion

- Todd said the Planning Dept. and the City Attorney gave their blessing and sent it to City Council.
 - Lilly noted that the Legislative Subcommittee of the City Council will be discussing the ordinance on Monday at 5 PM.
 - Molly will attend the meeting.
- Todd noted that in dealing with this particular draft, he had a number of questions:
 - He couldn’t find a copy of the original ordinance in the e-code.
 - It specifically mentions a number of zoning districts, but does not deal with all of the districts.
 - It triggers a special permit in most residential districts for a project that is removing trees (site plan approval required).
 - There is a disconnect in the setbacks.
 - There is a need to incentivize more solar projects in certain areas (parking lots, industrial areas, Brownfields, etc.).
 - It is lacking a master plan for prioritizing sites for solar arrays
- Molly thought that some language concerning rooftop arrays needed to be added in.
- On page 2, #1 - it mentions an analysis to be done, but there is no mention of who is to do it and what their qualifications are, and what the criteria for the analysis are.
 - She also felt that “one acre of slopes greater than 20%” was an arbitrary limit for erosion.
- On page 3, #3 – again there is no consistency.
- On page 2, #2 – Molly said “habitat” was never defined, and it needs to be.
 - She also noted that “structure and diversity of the canopy, midstory, and understory” needed as specific structured measurement, and that “diversity” was vague.
- On page 2, #2a – any forested area with certifiable vernal pools – she noted it has a requirement for a permit for the conservation commission, but areas other than this are not dealt with.
 - Although it does trigger a permit, Molly questioned what criteria would be used.
- On page 2, #2b – re: trees that are more than 100 years old – Molly asked how the determination of the age of a tree done? It should be the diameter of the tree, not the age.
 - “Clusters” also was undefined. Large trees are rarely are found in tight clusters, but that should not diminish their value.
- On page 3, first paragraph – “carbon neutral over the first ten years of operation” – the volume of trees removed is considered in #a, but there is no consideration in the formulas to the volume of sequestration those trees would have provided over ten years and beyond.

- On page 3, #3b – Molly questioned where “timber” was defined, and suggested “biomass”, or perhaps “live wood” instead. Timber generally refers to high quality logs and does not include tree canopy.
- Todd pointed out that the calculations on page 3, #3c needed significant work.
 - Converting today’s wood into short tons of carbon could be done and compared to the carbon offset of the project over 10 years.
 - Molly pointed out that an estimate of the amount of carbon a tree sequesters over 10 years can be produced, and the volume sequestered at the end of 10 years should be used in place of the volume measured on day 1.
- On page 3, #5 – “area beyond the first three acres of canopy removed” – Molly wondered why the first three acres were being excluded.
- On page 2, the section dealing with setbacks – Molly found this ill-defined, and questioned what was meant by “Open space = 20%”, and she referenced page 4, #4, where 50% pf the property is protected from tree clearing & future development.
- Molly felt the ordinance did not address the cumulative impact of siting PV arrays in the city, and asked what the limit was on the total land in the city developed for solar installations.
- Lilly noted that trees must be considered for more than carbon sequestration, but also mentioned the cooling effect they provide.
- Todd questioned if PV arrays constitute an impervious surface.
 - The City’s stormwater utility policy may define them as such.
- The area between a 12 PV system and a 3 acre PV system appears to be unregulated.
- Rich felt that the Planning Department needed to answer the questions. The Legislative subcommittee would not have the answers.
 - He feels the ordinance needs to be redone before moving forward – the whole procedure seemed really rushed.
 - Todd felt the most appropriate way of dealing with it would be to meet with the Planning Dept. and address the significant questions and concerns raised, and suggested a meeting for Monday.
 - Lilly asked Todd and Molly to write up questions and discussion points, and she will draft an email to Carolyn Misch.

| Motion | Motion By: | Seconded By: | Vote: |
|---|---------------|--------------|------------------------|
| To table the rest of the items on the agenda until the April 17, 2019 meeting | Sue Lofthouse | Todd Ford | Yes 6, No 0, Abstain 0 |

| Motion | Motion By: | Seconded By: | Vote: |
|------------|------------|---------------|------------------------|
| To adjourn | Todd Ford | Sue Lofthouse | Yes 6, No 0, Abstain 0 |

Meeting adjourned at 6:33 PM.